

Restless. His body twitches with an electricity that comes in waves.

She knows him well by now. “It’s time, isn’t it? Time you should be getting married. Not to me, though.” She raises herself on one arm so she can see his face. His hand rests on her hip. “I know what you want: short, a brunette, slimmer. Like . . . what’s her name? Like Binky.”

He shifts in discomfort. “No, that’s not it,” he says. “Besides, you know I love you.”

“Part of you does.” She looks into his eyes. “But it’s true, isn’t it?”

“It’s . . . Okay, it’s partly true. That’s *why* I love you: You know me.” He pulls her back down to him. “And I know you.”

Hot kisses and hot sex—the kind they always have—keep them going.

A month later, she finds the courage to leave.

Courage? She’s a coward. Doesn’t have the strength to say goodbye face to face.

He’s never at home on Tuesday afternoons—that’s the day he goes to the gym. She uses her key to enter his apartment. Everything is where it should be—he’s reliably tidy.

She retrieves the key to her apartment from the leather tray on the shelf in his closet and shoves a bottle of shampoo into her handbag.

Is there anything of hers in the closet? The sweet-rough touch of his jackets almost undermines her resolution.

She rushes to the door and throws it open. Once outside, she’s calm again. She slides the key to his place under the door.

He doesn’t call that week. Doesn’t call the next week either.

Later, when they do talk, it’s peaceful. It *was* time, after all. “You’re brave,” he says. “It’s part of what I lo— what I like about you.”

Seven months later, he writes. He is engaged. He and Binky plan to get married in April. She laughs. I was right! When did it start? Probably back in that uneasy period, when the last act was over and they were waiting for the curtain to fall.

Binky! It’s a joke, but it leaves a hollow feeling. She drops his letter into the wastebasket.

She moves away, and forgets him. Mostly, anyway.

A year passes. Then a little more. One day he shows up on her doorstep. He has driven across two state lines to reach her.

He looks the same, acts the same. “This place really suits you.”

He steps back half a pace, looks her over. “You look as beautiful as ever.”

She has no idea how to respond that, so she simply steps aside for him to enter.

Tanned, blond, strong, and charming—he’s as beautiful as ever, too.

The dress she wears is one he’s never seen, but somehow it seems familiar.

Everything feels welcoming, like home. He looks around and nods—the sofa, and the paintings, the books are all there. Even the bouquet of daisies she always seems to have.

She leads him through the house to the garden. They drink iced tea on the terrace.

Things with Binky got crazy—scenes, demands, recriminations, frauds, and fights, but . . . now—he stretches and leans back—he’s here. He can relax at last.

She’s wearing the same perfume—it’s part of her.

He remembers lying in the dunes at the beach, and the sea-salt air and that scent drifting over him. He leans toward her and looks into her eyes. Dark dark blue.

She hasn’t changed. Is her skin as soft as it always was?

Could he pull her into his arms, kiss her behind the ear, bury his nose in her red-gold hair, feel her sink into his arms, explore all that’s warm and taut? Hear her laugh?

He is paralyzed by unexpected timidity.

He touches her hand, turning it so he can see her palm. Both of them look down.

Her palm tingles. Suddenly, she’s out of breath, doesn’t dare move.

She can smell his aftershave and, below that, the warm scent of his skin. She remembers that scent, the feel of his skin, the silky contentment of their bodies together.

She is tempted. Tempted by the memory of the times they cooked and talked, the memory of walking through meadows and sailing to small islands, the memory of joyous unfettered carnality.

He looks up at her. She pulls back her hand and leans back.

Just in time. Otherwise she would have kissed him.

She knows you can’t go back. It never works.

And it’s true, the thing he said back then: She does know him. There’d be another Binky—someday.

A ring of condensation spreads into a pool when she lifts the pitcher. He sits back.

“On a hot day you need to stay cool,” she says.

He nods and squeezes a slice of lemon into his tea. The ice settles in the glasses.

He smiles at her. “It’s late. I guess I should be going.”

She sees regret in his eyes, and she knows he can see the same in hers.

At the door, he kisses her cheek. “The house suits you. I’m glad I came.”

He looks around, taking it all in, reluctant to release the frail thread of reconciliation.

“I’m glad, too,” she says. “Take care of yourself.” She steps inside and stops for a moment, listening for the slam of the car door. All she can hear is his footsteps on the gravel.

He walks to his car, inspects the left front tire.

He’d like to return—to the house, to her warmth, to the comfort of their . . . their relationship? their friendship? their . . . what?

Is that a scratch on the fender? He rubs it with his thumb. Just a smudge.

He dusts off his hands and climbs into the car.

As she tidies up and carries their glasses back to the kitchen, she hums a little tune. She can’t remember the words, so she lets the music fade away, borne on the back of welcoming silence.

In the twilight, a firefly mounts from the grass. Its sober black wings part as it rises, glowing and flickering, signaling the day’s end.